

From: Ed Truelove <edtruelove@sasktel.net>
Subject: FW: NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE
Date: August 20, 2007 1:33:08 AM CST
To: BCAF <bcaf@sasktel.net>

From: sululu william [mailto:epawekati@yahoo.com]
Sent: August 17, 2007 9:11 AM
To: Ed Truelove
Subject: Re: NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

From: epawekati @ yahoo. com
To: ed.truelove_tlv@ sasktel.net
Subject: NIGERIAN TRIP
Date: August 11th, 2007

Dear bro Ed,

Greetings in Jesus Name.

It was not an easy project. Planning and eventually making the trip took a lot of time and money.

I would have visited bro Sylvester Ebere by January 2007 but did not until April 2007.

There were twists and hurdles to go over. First there were documents. Nigeria is not a Commonwealth country and one has to obtain a visa to be allowed in the country. It took many days of correspondence between Sylvester and I trying to get the correct papers/letters which could be accepted. After a number of attempts I eventually got one that I presented on 16th April 2007.

There were many domestic trips I made in this regard traveling over 400 km one way to Nairobi from Bungoma. It was frustrating to be told at the Nigeria High Commission that the E-mail presented was not accepted as an Invitation Letter. Bro Sylvester tried to fax other letters which never reached me. So each time I would get to Nairobi where I was to retrieve the faxes from – it was always nil. Having purchased a ticket for the trip and set a date of departure did not help. This had to be changed and surcharge fee placed for not traveling on the scheduled date. Then there was the letter written and send by post which reached me but was unsigned!

When I finally got the visa, there was news of uncertainty in Nigeria. General Elections were taking place. News of insecurity was rife in the air, Kidnappings; especially in the Eastern, part of Nigeria seemed to be an every day occurrence. That was the part of the country I had to go to.

I asked Sylvester if we could meet in Lagos in the West. He did not appear enthusiastic about it. I now

understand why. In a way, by April he seemed to be giving up on the whole idea of the trip. He felt I was not going to make it at all. It was taking too long. I was optimistic it would work.

I left Bungoma on April 23rd. Now sure I was headed for Nigeria I had my air ticket confirmed. I told everybody I knew I was leaving Kenya.

On April 24th, having taken some U.S dollars from the bank I was taken to the airport. We took off at 1.00 p.m – 1300 hours Kenyan time. We were to arrive in Lagos at 4.25 p.m – 1625 hours. It was all smooth going until I arrived at Lagos.

I expected Bro S.E would have changed his mind and come to welcome me from the airport. It would have helped a lot. No. S.Ebere was not at the airport. I knew nobody. And from his last message to me, S.E had warned me against talking to strangers and asking for direction. "So, what do I do in the middle of nowhere?" My cell phone did not work when I got there. "How do I get in touch with S.E?". I thought. Then an idea struck me! "Yes, get a new sim card and insert in your phone." "Wait; get Nigerian nairas first then buy the necessary gadgets." That done, the phone came alive and so did my hope....

After several attempts I knew something was amiss. S.E could not be reached. I tried a public phone. Nothing worked. It seemed to have gone dead. I wondered whether I had been conned. Someone had said, "Don't you ever trust a Nigerian, You will get yourself stripped naked and everything gone." The urge to ask someone kept coming to me. But the warning lights kept coming too. "Ask no stranger." You remember what you said? "Remember to be very cautious with anything to do with cash over there." As time wore on and it was getting to 6 o'clock and S.E was not accessible, I had to take courage, throw caution to the wind and ask someone I thought I could trust. My! It happened to be a tax driver.

"How do I get to ABC Transporters?" I asked the fellow. "Traveling to the east?" he wondered in his Nigerian accent. Another hurdle. Understanding them is not very easy. "You can't travel to the East at night" he cautioned. "It is very risky."

I did not know what to say next. Then quickly changed my line of thought and said to him, "I was waiting for a friend who was to pick me up. If he does not come maybe I could use your cab", I put in. That seemed to liven him up. He even offered me his phone to use. We did not get through to S E.

At 7 pm I asked him if he could take me to that ABC place. He told me it was too far and would mean parting with a lot of cash. That was scaring. Flights to the East had been suspended after shootouts at the Enugu airfield in the East two days before my arrival. It would have been much easier to connect a flight from the same airport to Enugu. Venturing into the unknown was not something to amuse anyone.

I did not know how much I was to pay to get to town. After giving up on the idea of ABC I settled on anywhere in town. He talked of 5000 Naira - \$39. His was a classy vehicle - Mercedes Benz. I got in and resigned to fate.

"Take me to the nearest hotel" - but quickly added, "The place should have a reasonable tariff."

He took me to Marriot Hotel where I paid US \$50 for the night. I was thankful to God I was in the safety of a good hotel. Everything about me was intact.

If I had known the buses leave early I would have left in the earlier. Besides I had to get to hear from S.E. I had send a text message to S.E. which kept pending until the phones started working. I then got a call from S.E. as I was taking my breakfast. I was so delighted. My sms (text message) to Faith in Kenya got

through at night. She had responded.

S.E. then told me what to do. Get to the ABC transporters for Eastern bound buses. By the time I reached the place having taken a cab, the buses had left. I was to book the overnight buses. The fare was higher because of the risks involved. Putting up again in Lagos seemed an expensive affair. I decided to take the risk. Since the bus was leaving in the evening I had many waiting hours.

I took a cab to town to see Lagos and buy a film. In the evening I got back to ABC Transporters where I boarded a luxury bus for the East. The way you are screened before you get to the bus adds to the fear of the unknown. We had to remove belts, shoes and even socks. The screening was thorough.

Somewhere in the middle of the night we stopped at a station where we were told we were not to proceed further as some highway robbery had taken place where we were heading to. We left the place at 6.am. We arrived at Owerri, bro S.E's town at around 9.am; 4 or 5 hours late.

Then my phone went dead because of power. S.E. was not at the station.

After charging it I was able to get in touch with S.E. He came to the bus station to pick me up. This was on April 26th. I learned that his phone had not worked because of power failure in his town.

S.E. took me to his mother's place in Owerri town. Here I was treated to a typical Nigeria style welcome –'kola nut breaking,' wine and a special prayer:

"You came in one piece,
Stay in one piece,
And in peace.
When you leave,
May they receive you in one piece,
And in peace."

They gave me kola nut saying, "Here is a kola nut to show when you get back to your people that you met peaceful people in Nigeria."

S.E.'s mum, his younger brother, S.E. and myself shared the nut. What an experience!

We went to a hotel near his place of residence. My accent reminded me of "Shibboleth." The rooms were going at 2000 naira but within minutes the price accelerated or escalated first to 2500 then 3500 naira! When we told S.E's forceful wife, she went to them and it was put at 2500 naira.

We then went visiting our people in and around the town. Later we started on the interview.

I was impressed by the amount of knowledge of truth Sylvester has embraced. The interview went on the following day.

I had an opportunity to meet quite a number of those with Sylvester Ebere in this part of the world. The time was short; I did not have the time to interview each one of them. But it was a pleasure to meet such jolly people.

It is my hope I will be able to make another trip to see them, God willing.

When I was in Lagos, just before I went to board the plane back to Kenya, two contacts from the East who

live in Lagos came to see me off. I wish to see them start the lessons soon. There was someone who had taken me around in Lagos who became a good friend – Issa and his brother Abubakar. They made sure I got the right cab to the airport at US \$8! My ‘shibboleth’ would have involved \$50!

Now I am wiser and have the experience. It would not cost as much time and money if I was to make it back to Nigeria. The young ecclesia needs a quick visit to allay fears they have. The wonder of a new doctrine.

Bro Sylvester needs a lot of support - including financial to get around and to help his correspondence with contacts going. He is not rich in material things but rich in faith. He has a zeal for the Truth and I would be happy to see that fire remain aglow. His relatives are not very supportive. He has tried to put out his meagre earnings to the demands of the ecclesia. I admired that.

Like most Africans, those new converts expect material things to color what they accept. In other words, those within and those without expect to see the leading lights in the truth showing a change in status. In fact they expect handouts from us. That was evident in Nigeria.

As in my case, they expected I was loaded with dollars. No doubt a number of them were disappointed I did not appear to be moneyed. I don't blame them. Even if we have the good word and that man cannot live on bread alone, there must be a contribution towards making those who have the willing heart to spread the Gospel, do it without much strain. When they are anxious of their next meal or place to lay their head, they do harm to the Truth.

My appeal is that Sylvester Ebere and those like him should get all the support in this regard. He has not just received the "pound" but is going out to ensure it earns another pound. Assistance to him is assistance to the Truth.

A number of brethren in Kenya show laxity in proclamation of the Gospel. And even when they get the means, they do very little to show how dear they hold the truth. That makes me desire to meet S.E again. A very admirable character.

By the way, there was this doctor in S.E's town who, having seen me, asked if I was S.E's elder brother. When S.E. told him I was from Kenya, the jovial doctor exclaimed, "Ask his father if he ever visited Nigeria, because you look alike."

So, I wish to visit my look-alike brother Sylvester and his out-going wife, Patience. Yes, and all those members and friends in the young ecclesia. It was an experience that will long linger on my mind.

Your bro,

Epa